

**An innovative approach through the use of humor in teaching
English for Specific Purposes (ESP) in Post-training crash courses:
The case of Ministry of Tourism Vocational Training Institutes.**

Sofia Christidou

schristidou@civil.auth.gr

Department of Civil Engineering, Division of Hydraulics and Environmental
Engineering, School of Engineering, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki

Abstract

During the academic year 2018-2019 dr. Sofia Christidou taught the course “English Language” for the Catering Class 2 in the Post-training crash courses of the Ministry of Tourism` Vocational Training Institute of Peraia. The course lasted 120 hours and the participants were employees in the field of Catering. The teaching of Tourism Terminology was selected instead of the traditional learning approach which usually included the teaching of grammatical and syntactic rules of the English Language. The material for teaching this course was selected by the teacher and mainly included Units from the *Tourism and Hotels & Catering* books by Express Publishing. For teaching terminology through texts and lexical exercises the application *Express Digi Books* was used that allowed an interactive learning approach of the material. Furthermore, the teacher encouraged the students to adopt improvisations with humorous extensions in Speaking-exercises through role-playing in order to obtain a more personal approach to the English language. For students` evaluation, final exams were performed with a preceding mock exam. Finally, upon completion of the courses, a questionnaire was distributed to the students, where the individual elements of the teaching were evaluated and furthermore students were asked to make suggestions for future improvement of foreign language teaching.

Keywords: crash courses, English for Specific Purposes, humor, tourism terminology, research via questionnaire.

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Περίληψη

Κατά τη διάρκεια του ακαδημαϊκού έτους 2018-2019 Η Δρ. Σοφία Χρηστίδου δίδαξε το μάθημα Αγγλική Γλώσσα για το τμήμα Επισιτισμός 2 στο πλαίσιο των εντατικών μαθημάτων μετεκπαίδευσης του Ινστιτούτου Επαγγελματικής Κατάρτισης του Υπουργείου Τουρισμού στην Περαιά. Το μάθημα διήρκεσε 120 ώρες και οι συμμετέχοντες ήταν υπάλληλοι στον τομέα του Επισιτισμού. Επιλέχτηκε η διδασκαλία της Ορολογίας του Τουρισμού αντί της παραδοσιακής μαθησιακής προσέγγισης, η οποία συνήθως περιελάμβανε τη διδασκαλία γραμματικών και συντακτικών κανόνων της Αγγλικής Γλώσσας. Το υλικό για τη διδασκαλία αυτού του μαθήματος επιλέχθηκε από την καθηγήτρια και περιελάμβανε κυρίως κεφάλαια από τα βιβλία *Tourism* και *Hotels & Catering* από τις εκδόσεις Express Publishing. Για τη διδασκαλία της ορολογίας μέσω κειμένων και λεξιλογικών ασκήσεων χρησιμοποιήθηκε η εφαρμογή Express Digi Books που παρείχε μια προσέγγιση διαδραστικής εκμάθησης του υλικού. Επιπλέον, ο δάσκαλος ενθάρρυνε τους μαθητές να υιοθετήσουν αυτοσχεδιασμούς με χιουμοριστικές προεκτάσεις στις προφορικές ασκήσεις μέσω υπόδυσης ρόλων, προκειμένου να αποκτήσουν μια πιο προσωπική προσέγγιση στην αγγλική γλώσσα. Για την αξιολόγηση των φοιτητών πραγματοποιήθηκαν τελικές εξετάσεις ενώ προηγήθηκε εικονική εξέταση. Τέλος, με την ολοκλήρωση των μαθημάτων, διανεμήθηκε ένα ερωτηματολόγιο στους μαθητές, όπου αξιολογήθηκαν τα επιμέρους στοιχεία της διδασκαλίας και επιπλέον ζητήθηκε από τους μαθητές να κάνουν προτάσεις για μελλοντική βελτίωση της διδασκαλίας ξένων γλωσσών.

Λέξεις-κλειδιά: εντατικά μαθήματα, Αγγλικά για Ειδικούς Σκοπούς, χιούμορ, τουριστική ορολογία, έρευνα μέσω ερωτηματολογίου.

1. Theoretical review

1.1 Introduction to the ESP

The creation period of the field of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) can be placed during the era that followed the Second World War, when the changes that were introduced due to the war activity in scientific, technical, and economic fields were also implemented in the peaceful, post-war period. These changes sparked a new age of technology and commerce, an age dominated for the need of an international language. This responsibility was assumed by the world's lingua franca of science, technology and business, the English language. With ever growing technologic and economic developments piling up, a new type of learner emerged, with his own specific reasons and motives for learning English.

The field of ESP faced many improvements and changes until today, but we are able to provide a definition that best encapsulates its meaning and represents its general purposes:

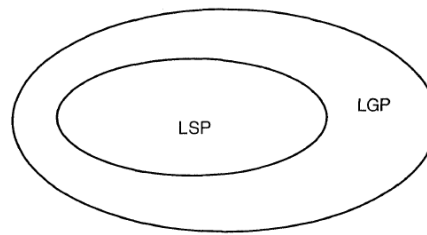
English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is an approach to language teaching that targets the current and/or future academic or occupational needs of learners, focuses on the language, skills, discourses, and genres required to address these needs, and assists learners in meeting these needs through general and/or discipline-specific teaching and learning methodologies.

(Anthony: 2015)

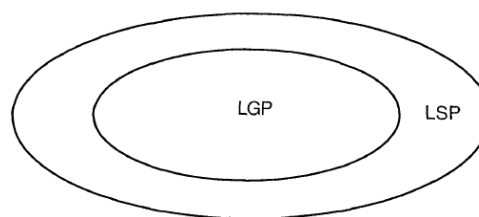
Apart from that, it is essential to depict the similarities and the differences between Language for General Purposes and Language for Special Purposes.

1.2 Tracing out the Connection between Language for General Purposes and Language for Special Purposes.

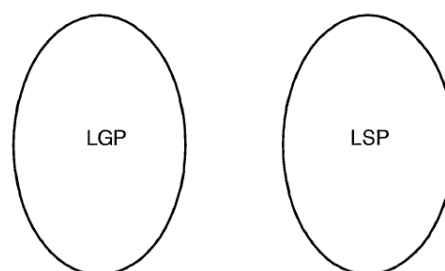
Most linguists make a basic distinction between language for general purposes and language for special purposes. But opinions differ as to the relationship between the two. According to the various existing theories presented by H. Bergenholtz and S. Tarp language for general purposes (= LGP) may be seen as being synonymous with standard language and all languages for special purposes (= LSPs) are regarded as elements of general language. This conforms to the view that a certain language system is determined by the general-language system and that, to a greater or lesser extent, all LSPs make use of the general-language system.



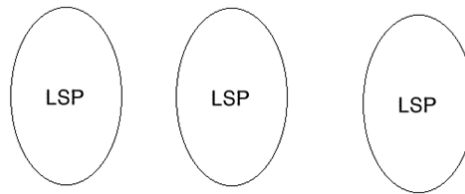
Other linguists take the exact opposite view. In their opinion, all general-language expressions are found in special language as well, with the latter concluding, collectively and individually, all the LSP expressions which characterise the different specialised worlds of LSP.



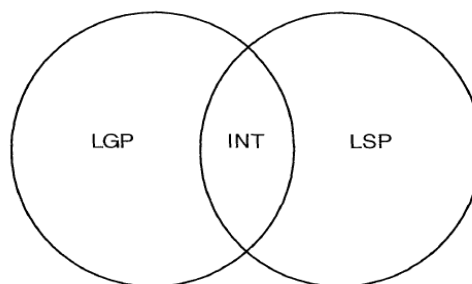
From a communicative point of view, LGP and LSP are used in completely different aspects of communication. Here LSP refers to the language used by experts communicating within their areas of expertise. On the other hand general language must be resorted to in everyday communication, as expert knowledge is not considered to be presupposed. Although to a certain extent it is possible to refer to the same things by using general language, communication has to be so simplified that the whole can no longer be considered LSP. LSP and LGP are thus equal, yet distinct, phenomena.



A fourth possibility is to dismiss altogether the existence of LGP as a phenomenon in its own right and instead to assume that each usage is specific to a certain situation. This approach suggests that every language variety is an LSP. Thus, a legal magazine or a handbook of medicine represents different LSPs.



In general, however, LSP uses only a part of this assumed general language, such as certain grammatical construction possibilities and not all general-language words, but then special technical terms and in some cases also register-specific structures are used as well. This interaction of languages is forming a communicative pattern, in which the intersection between LGP and LSP is made up of structures and elements occurring in both LGP and LSP.



Apart from the theoretical framework that needs to be applied in order to maximize the specific learning results requested by the student's profile and needs, an educator may use a number of practical methods to achieve the best comprehension of the teaching material by the students. One such main method is the use of humor in various ways, whose benefits are presented below.

1.3 The benefits of using humor in the teaching process.

The function of humor as a teaching tool is until now not yet fully analyzed by the academic community. Nevertheless, many educators, based on their teaching experience, underline the importance of using humor in the teaching process, as a key factor for a better comprehension of the teaching material by the students. The major aspects that humor improves directly or indirectly the teaching process, as they were described by Mary Kay Morrison (2008), are the following:

- **Contribution to Mind/Body Balance**

The optimistic energy that comes from humor enables the students to embrace difficulties with resilience. The purposeful use of humor can help them to feel more optimistic about life, knowing that they can choose how to respond to stress. Humor elevates mood and has been known to be a deterrent to depression.

- **Maximization of Brain Power**

Humor has the ability to capture the attention of the brain. The surprise elements of humor alert the attentional center of the brain and increase the likelihood of memory storage and long term retrieval.

Word play, puns, stories, jokes, and riddles all involve the creative use of language. Maximizing our capacity to use language through the skillful use of humor increases the number and speed of the neural connections in the brain. Humor is often used as an indicator for the identification of gifted students.

- **Enhancement of Creativity**

Creativity is the ability of the brain to bring together diverse ideas that will generate the thinking necessary for complex problem solving. Humor and creativity are great companions, each a perfect complement for the other in nourishing thinking.

Humor increases the potential for divergent thinking and the ability to solve complex problems. By linking previously unconnected areas of the brain, humor forges new associations involving existing concepts.

- **Facilitation of Communication**

Humor generates trust among colleagues and can facilitate a reduction in tension, fear, and anger. Humorists are able to use reframing (example: the ridiculous or exaggeration) as a device to facilitate a shift in context. This shift encourages both individuals and groups to think creatively through shared humor. Laughter can quickly dispel tension and increases the capacity for dialogue.

- **Support of the Change Process**

Humor can be an indicator of how we are responding to change. Our belief systems, our evolved coping skills, our physical being, our temperament, our experiences, our culture, and our gender all combine within our individual neurological system and are all involved in generating our individual response to change. The humor response of any group is a reflection of organizational thinking and can reflect the ability of that culture to adapt.

- **Creation of an Optimal Environment for Teaching and Learning**

Leadership is correlated with building relationships based on trust. Trust is considered the basis for creating successful learning communities, because it facilitates teamwork and is the foundation for cultivating relationships. A strong bond of trust among members of the school community is essential for school improvement.

Humor thrives in an environment of trust and is a major factor that contributes to building trust. When multiple choices are available to an individual within a relationship or within an organization, there are increased opportunities for a sense of humor to thrive.

2.0 Short presentation of the Vocational Training Institutes of the Ministry of Tourism and the English Language crash course.

Eight Vocational Training Institutes (in Anavyssos Attica, Kokkini Hani Heraklion Crete, Rhodes, Peraia Thermaikos Thessaloniki, Argos Peloponnese, Galaxidi, Alexandroupoli and Corfu) of the Ministry of Tourism throughout the Greek territory offer four Education Curricula, namely:

- Tourist Units' and Hosting Technician (Reception - Floor Service - Freight Expertise)
- Culinary Arts Technician - Chef
- Bakery – Pastry Technician
- Management and Finance Officer in Tourism.

Apart from these Curricula, every Vocational Training Institute offers every year crash courses for the Tourism` professionals, in order to enhance their skills. The aforementioned English Language course was part of these crash courses for the Catering Class. The course lasted from 27/11/2018 until 12/04/2019, 120 hours. The material for teaching this course was selected by the teacher and mainly included Units from the *Tourism and Hotels & Catering* books by Express Publishing. The selection of these books aimed at the teaching of tourist terminology rather than the traditional material that included mainly grammatical and syntactic rules and exercises. Apart from the printed material used for the course (books, vocabulary lists ect.) the application *Express Digi Books* was introduced in the classroom so that every student could be able to download it in his/her smart phone or PC. This application gave the students the opportunity to solve the exercises of the book while they were outside the classroom and receive feedback on their answers immediately. This advantage was extremely helpful for solving old exercises by the students and thus contributed in their self-evaluation. Besides that, additional Listening exercises were included in the application, exercises that helped the students to improve their listening skills which are crucial in their line of occupation. Finally, during the speaking exercises in form of dialogue inside the classroom by the students, the teacher urged the participants to use their sense of humor with smart remarks, a procedure that proved to be both entertaining and educative, as they released all their potential because they didn't feel the

pressure of participating in an oral exercise despite the existing educational and social differences amongst them.

As far as the structure of the course is concerned, apart from the final exams a mock exam was conducted in the middle of the curriculum, in order for the students to familiarize with the exam process.

3.0 Presentation of the research

3.1 Profile of the research

15 questionnaires were handed out in person to the students of the “English Language” course as part of the Post-training crash courses of the Ministry of Tourism` Vocational Training Institute that sat for the final exams. 13 subjects were male and two female. The questionnaires were responded by one subject aged 18-25 years old; eight subjects aged 26-35 years old and six subjects aged 36-45 years old. Out of 15 respondents, 14 had acquired certain knowledge of the English language (two on an A level, seven on a B level, three on a C1 level and two on a C2 level). Moreover, three subjects had acquired certain knowledge of the German language (two on a B level and one on a C2 level) and one had acquired certain knowledge of another language on a B level). As far as the educational level of the respondents is concerned, one had received basic education (graduate of junior high school), one subject had graduated from technical high school, seven subjects had graduated from high school, five subjects had graduated from a Vocational Training Institute and one had a higher education degree.

3.2 Structure of the questionnaire

The first four questions of the questionnaire refer to the subject`s demographic data. Those include sex, age, foreign language knowledge level and educational level.

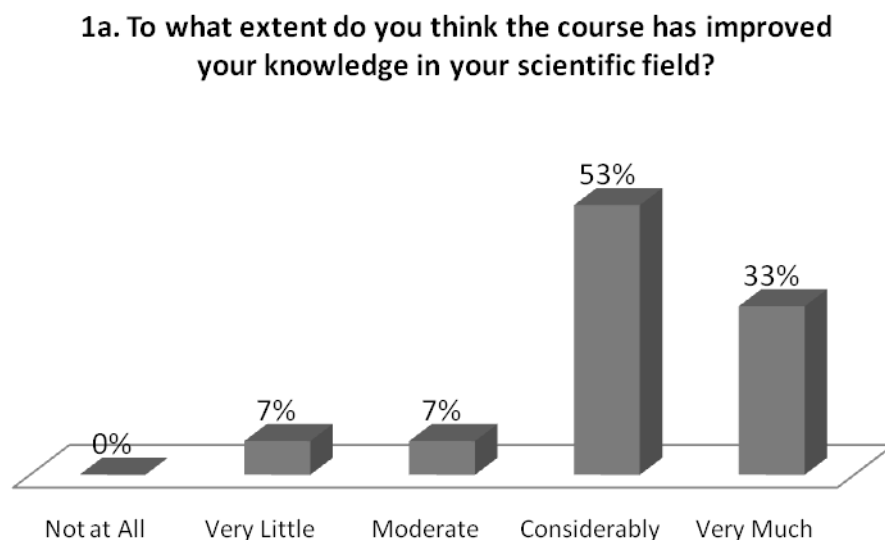
The main body of the questionnaire consists of eleven questions. The first question is divided in three parts, all evaluating the course associated with a different aspect of the subject`s language improvement. Questions two, four, five, eight and nine aim to evaluate the teaching methods implemented by the teacher, while questions three and ten explore the tendency of subjects towards proposed course improvements and questions six and seven try to depict the opinion of the students for further use of the handbook after the completion of the course. Finally, the eleventh question is asking about any proposals by

the students, in order to increase the course efficiency. The chosen type of question is close-ended, thus achieving an easier answers` comparison of different respondents, and an easier coding and statistical analyzing of the answers. The given answers are Not at All, Very Little, Moderate, Considerably and Very Much. Only the eleventh question is open-ended, a necessary choice, in order that the subjects express freely their opinion of course improvement.

3.3 Presentation of findings

1a. To what extent do you think the course has improved your knowledge in your scientific field?

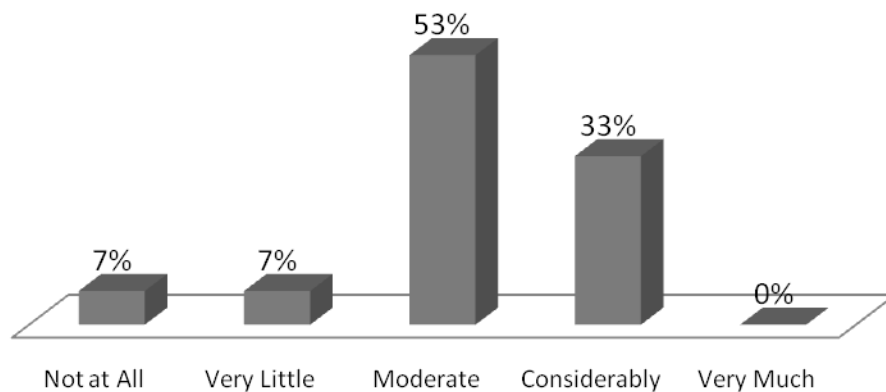
None of the subjects answer this question by choosing Not at All, 7% by choosing Very Little, 7% by choosing Moderate, 53% by choosing Considerably and 33% chose Very Much.



1b. To what extent do you consider that the course has contributed in improving your reading skills in English?

7% of the subjects answer this question by choosing Not at All, 7% by choosing Very Little, 53% by choosing Moderate, 33% by choosing Considerably and none chose Very Much.

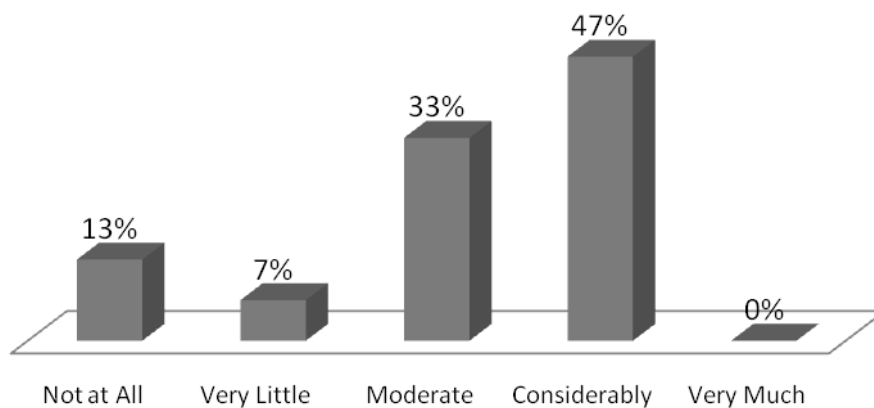
1b. To what extent do you consider that the course has contributed in improving your reading skills in English?



1c. To what extent do you think that the course has contributed in improving your English level?

13% of the subjects answer this question by choosing Not at All, 7% by choosing Very Little, 33% by choosing Moderate, 47% by choosing Considerably and none chose Very Much.

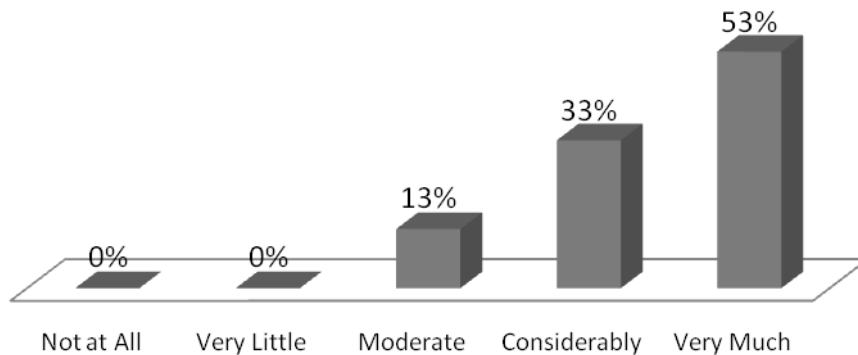
1c. To what extent do you think that the course has contributed in improving your English level?



2. To what extent do you think that the teaching method helped you in using the Express DigiBooks online application?

None of the subjects answer this question by choosing Not at All, also none by choosing Very Little, 13% by choosing Moderate, 33% by choosing Considerably and 53% chose Very Much.

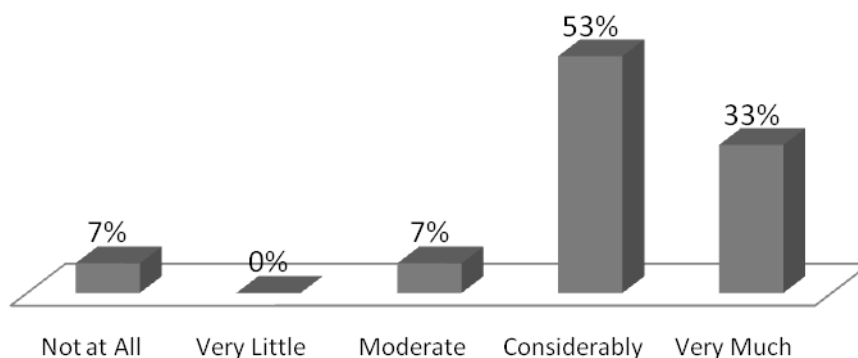
2. To what extent do you think that the teaching method helped you in using the Express DigiBooks online application?



3. How much do you think it would help expanding the teaching hours of the course, based on the teaching material (handbooks, textbooks ect)?

7% of the subjects answer this question by choosing Not at All, none by choosing Very Little, 7% by choosing Moderate, 53% by choosing Considerably and 33% chose Very Much.

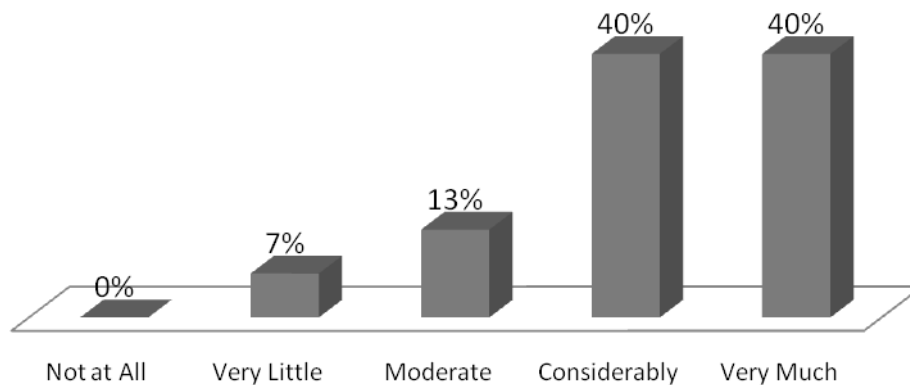
3. How much do you think it would help expanding the teaching hours of the course, based on the teaching material (handbooks, textbooks ect)?



4. How much did the exclusive use of tourist terminology material help you (in contrast to the use of material concerning grammatical and syntactic rules and exercises)?

None of the subjects answer this question by choosing Not at All, 7% by choosing Very Little, 13% by choosing Moderate, 40% by choosing Considerably and 40% chose Very Much.

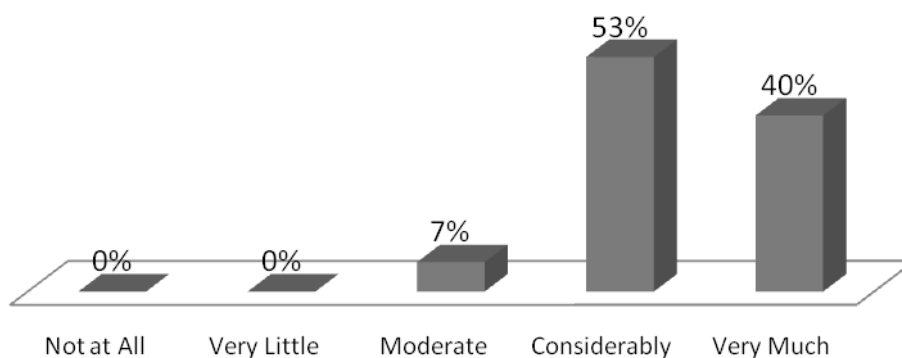
4. How much did the exclusive use of tourist terminology material help you (in contrast to the use of material concerning grammatical and syntactic rules and exercises)?



5. How much did improvisation with humorous extensions in Speaking-exercises through role-playing with your neighbor-classmate by using video in the digital material helped you?

None of the subjects answer this question by choosing Not at All, also none by choosing Very Little, 7% by choosing Moderate, 53% by choosing Considerably and 40% chose Very Much.

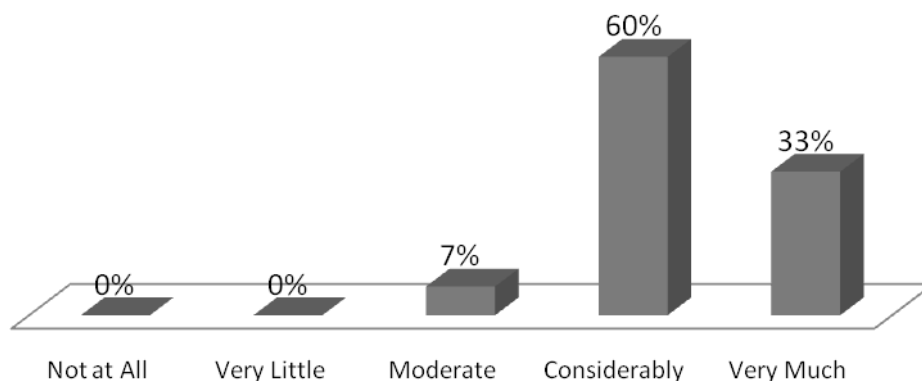
5. How much did improvisation with humorous extensions in Speaking-exercises through role-playing with your neighbor-classmate by using video in the digital material helped you?



6. How often do you think you will use in the future the handbook you now hold for further training?

None of the subjects answer this question by choosing Not at All, also none by choosing Very Little, 7% by choosing Moderate, 60% by choosing Considerably and 33% chose Very Much.

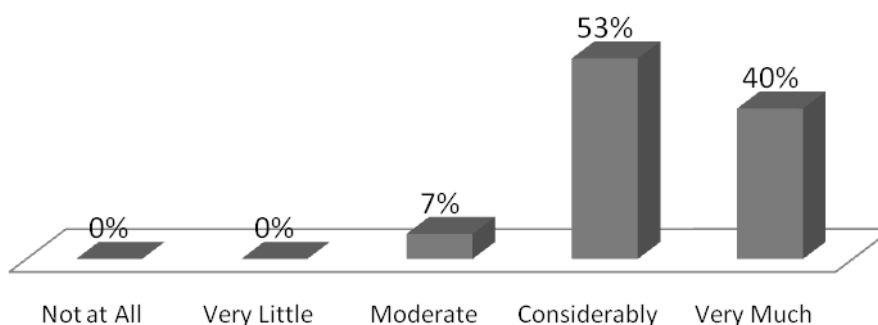
6. How often do you think you will use in the future the handbook you now hold for further training?



7. How often do you think you will use the handbook you now own as a source of vocabulary reference in your professional activity based on the translation process conducted by the teacher in Greek?

None of the subjects answer this question by choosing Not at All, also none by choosing Very Little, 7% by choosing Moderate, 53% by choosing Considerably and 40% chose Very Much.

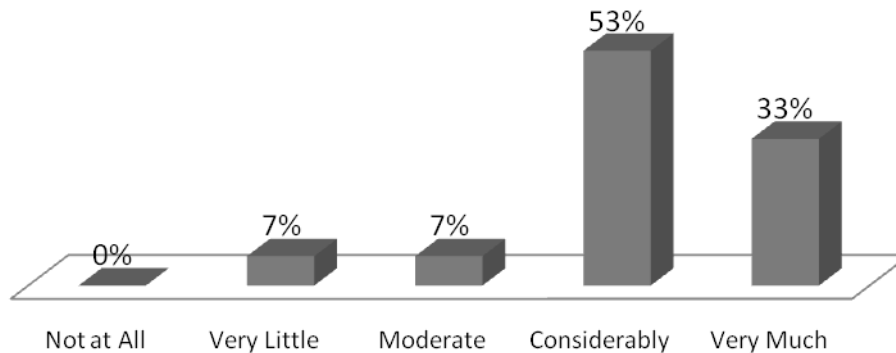
7. How often do you think you will use the handbook you now own as a source of vocabulary reference in your professional activity based on the translation process conducted by the teacher in Greek?



8. How did the fact that at the end of each unit you made your own suggestions for tourist terms equivalent to the Greek that the teacher provided in English helped you?

None of the subjects answer this question by choosing Not at All, 7% by choosing Very Little, 7% by choosing Moderate, 53% by choosing Considerably and 33% chose Very Much.

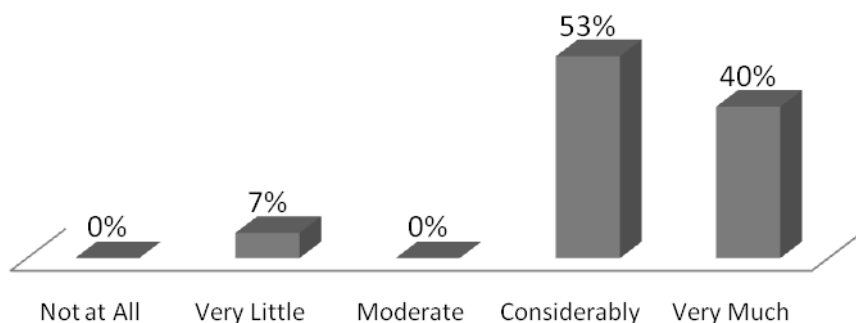
8. How did the fact that at the end of each unit you made your own suggestions for tourist terms equivalent to the Greek that the teacher provided in English helped you?



9. How much do you think that dividing the material in half by using the mock exam has helped you, as well as the repetitions of the digital material itself in the form of contest?

None of the subjects answer this question by choosing Not at All, 7% by choosing Very Little, none by choosing Moderate, 53% by choosing Considerably and 40% chose Very Much.

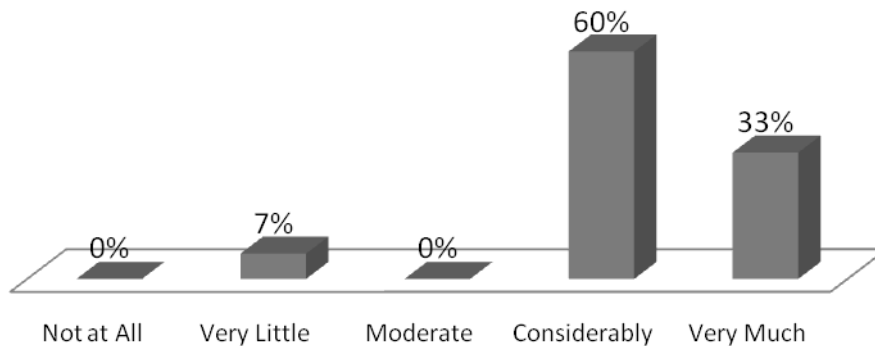
9. How much do you think that dividing the material in half by using the mock exam has helped you, as well as the repetitions of the digital material itself in the form of contest?



10. Do you think that a written assignment by the usage of text from your field of knowledge and its presentation to the classroom would be helpful in expanding your knowledge?

None of the subjects answer this question by choosing Not at All, 7% by choosing Very Little, none by choosing Moderate, 60% by choosing Considerably and 33% chose Very Much.

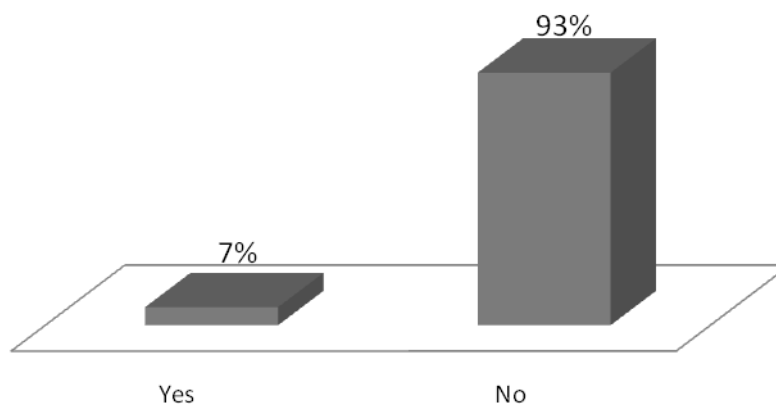
10. Do you think that a written assignment by the usage of text from your field of knowledge and its presentation to the classroom would be helpful in expanding your knowledge?



11. Do you have any suggestions for improving the teaching of this course?

One subject has made a suggestion of improving the teaching of this course. The suggestion focused on splitting the students in two groups according to their English language level.

11. Do you have any suggestions for improving the teaching of this course?



3.4 Comments on findings

The students found the course overall useful as the negative opinions for improving their knowledge in their scientific field have been restricted to a 7%, while the negative opinions that the course has contributed in improving their reading skills in English and the improvement of their English level has gathered 14% and 20% respectively.

Questions two, four, five, eight, and nine tried to evaluate the methods of teaching the course, methods that weren't familiar with their previous experience as foreign language students. To all those questions the response was considerably positive, which is a clear confirmation that the use of non-conventional methods stimulated the students' interest and helped the overall learning process, and moreover that the innovative planning of the course by the teacher proved to be successful.

Questions three and ten focused on recommendations made by Dr. Christidou in improving the quality of the course, based on her previous research and innovative learning methods she has implemented (2017) (2016). These recommendations include the increase of the course duration to a following exam and the inclusion of a written assignment. The response of the subjects to these recommendations was relatively positive, an indication firstly of the correct decision for proposing these improvements and secondly of the will of the students to ameliorate the provided educational level and to increase their professional knowledge.

This trend is also visible in the given answers to the last question, where the opinion of the subjects was asked, in order to improve the course. The only given suggestion underlines the fact that students with different knowledge of the English language should be taught in different classes with different teaching material, an issue that should concern the crash course organizers, namely the Ministry of Tourism.

The general conclusion that derives from the abovementioned points is that the teaching of the of the course "English Language" for the Catering Class 2 in the Post-training crash courses of the Ministry of Tourism` Vocational Training Institute is considered highly important by the students of the aforementioned crash course. Having that in mind a point to consider is that a students` ranking and grading in different classes should be implemented according to their language knowledge level in addition to the use of humor in teaching the course a method that was successfully implemented during the course that enhanced creativity and created an Optimal Environment for Teaching and Learning. Moreover the expansion of the course duration is considered a necessity in order to cover more topics of the appointed book and to be able to implement the alternative proposed teaching methods.

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